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The effectiveness of the teacher and the school in helping children to gain a more positive and realistic view of one's self is discussed. A workshop, attended by 65 elementary school teachers, and designed to aid in their understanding of self concept and to help them to put this understanding into practice in the classroom is described. The procedural format of each of the 11 four-hour programs was (1) a one-hour lecture by a university consultant, (2) a one-hour discussion in small groups with school counselors as leaders, and (3) a two-hour session to develop classroom material to foster self-understanding. Examples of classroom activities and occurrences resulting from the program are presented. (PS)

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IMPROVEMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT: A VITAL FACTOR IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Let me start with a definition of self-concept so that you can understand the framework from which I work. Sarbin (1954) stated, "The self is what the person is." Self-concept, a composite of numerous self-percepts, is an hypothetical construct, encompassing all of the values, attitudes and beliefs toward one's self in relation to the environment. The self-concept influences and to a great degree determines perception and behavior.

Over the past twenty or so years great emphasis in psychological thought has been given to the formation and dynamics involved in self-theory. The idea has evolved that many of the difficulties individuals face through life are intricately meshed with their conception of themselves and the world in which they live. Studies have shown that there is a close relationship between self attitudes and individual behavior (Morgan, 1961), that self-concept affects awareness of racial and religious group membership (Radke-Yarrow, Trager and Davis, 1949), reading capability (Staines, 1956), academic achievement (Shaw and Alves, 1963) (Combs, 1964) (Brookover et al, 1964) and student perceptions of the teacher (Davidson and Lang, 1960). Patterson (1957) and Chambers (1965) reported that individuals with negative self-concepts make inadequate vocational choices. Certainly, the work of the Career Pattern Study at Columbia has emphasized the importance of self-concept in career development. A person with high self-esteem will seek a job with which there is equally high prestige (Korman, 1967). Vocational self-concepts are significantly related to achievement in high school (O'Hara, 1966).

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A person has to be able to see himself as a professional, technical or skilled worker and in addition a person of worth if he is going to become one.

I have been aware of the theoretical implications of self-concept theory and of course its importance to practice ever since my courses in undergraduate psychology. I have, however, had this realization solidified over the last year, in my transactions with youngsters and the teachers of youngsters in the inner-city. Let me give you an example. In one kindergarten classroom, the teacher asked the youngsters, "If you could have one wish to become anyone in the world, who would you like to become?" Several youngsters responded that they would like to be themselves, while others wanted to be parents or various famous adult figures. One youngster responded, "I would like to be a cat or a dog. . .because dogs and cats are petted and are loved." I think we recognize that to be petted and loved may not be completely a function of self-concept, but in the preceding situation it certainly is illustrative.

It follows, then, that the development of a positive self-concept, a healthy personality, can be considered an asset to the individual. I have heard it said that the major formation of one's personality is accomplished by the age of seven, and as such, is greatly influenced by parent-child interaction. Brooks (1963) states that the child appears upon the human scene without self; the self is a social product conceived and born in the process of social interaction. Merrill (1965) notes that the most important group of social interaction is the family for it is here the child acquires first impressions of human conditions. Even though the

causes for most human problems rest in history, and attitudes and values about self, others and environment were set sometime early in life, we cannot assume that what was true at one time cannot be changed. It should be recognized, therefore, that the school can play a major role in the development of an adequate self-concept. Research shows that while the self-concept is resistant to change, it appears that modifications can be made (Engel, 1959) (Frankel, 1964) (Shaw et al, 1960).

How do the present studies relate to prior research? They substantiate the fact that self-concept plays an important role in personal development. Let me use several selected quotes from these studies to demonstrate this:

> Results of the present study indicate that positive modification of vocational maturity through a program of structured career-related activities is possible for inner-city youth (Vriend, 1968, p. 132).

> The implications of the present study are that inner-city students desire, need, and respond to attempts on the part of school personnel to help them in their vocational development (Vriend, 1968, p. 133).

> The primary purpose of such an approach [compensatory counseling] would be to reverse the racial self-image of large groups of Negro students in a relatively short period of time. Once the racial self-image of the group has been enhanced, there is considerable evidence that changes in the self-concept and behavior of individuals will follow (Woodruff, 1968).

Admittedly, the use of the term "self-concept" may give rise to communicational difficulties and misunderstanding. First, as Lowe (1961) has pointed out the operational and philosophical meanings of this term may not correspond. Second, the researcher since self-concept deals with inner experience, faces some problems in attempting to measure it. Third, while most theoretical constructs and paradigms of self-concept appear to

be closed circular affairs, it may be in fact that a loxodromic curve is more appropriate. Finally, one takes note of McDaniel's (1968) criticism of the generalizations that emanated from the study of Vocational Maturity on Ninth-Grade boys, for as he states, they do not take into consideration the work of the school counselor. Well, be that as it may, let's talk simply about the improvement of self-image of inner-city youngsters.

The problem becomes one of effecting positive movement in self-image thus improving chances of adequate school, personal-social, and career adjustment, through the vehicle of group interaction among student and significant adults. We have to take a look at what is going on inside the other person, for this is the essence of self-concept. It is not only the experience itself that is important, but more crucial is what the youngster thinks about the experience. If self-concept is to be changed, we have to look at the mechanisms which maintain that concept. We must study what the youngster tells himself, for this is the emotion-arousing stimulus.

If a youngster is telling himself that he is no good, he must be convinced that we don't believe it. What McClelland's studies of achievement have shown is that the more you believe that by your own efforts you can change things, the more likely you are to do well (Lafferty, Wayne State University Speech).

This is important for it has implications for the school and particularly the teacher. With mental health statistics, indicating increasing numbers of mental health problems, an emphasis must be placed on the preventative rather than the curative components in the psychological field. The school is fertile ground for action programs improving self-concept and eventual career development and for working with "what youngsters tell

themselves." The individual teacher can play a very great role in enabling the child to gain a more positive and realistic view of self (Davidson and Lang, 1960). We attempted to do this in the Developmental Career Guidance Project in Detroit in a pilot study this past year. Approximately sixty-five teachers gathered to take part in a workshop designed to aid teachers in their understanding of self-concept and to have the teachers actually put this into practice within the classroom. In other words the teachers were to teach to their youngsters the learnings that were acquired in the workshop.

More specifically, this workshop, which was held at one of the ten schools participating in the Development Career Guidance Project, involved teachers primarily at the elementary level. School counselors and university consultants combined to provide leadership. The procedural format of each four-hour program (of which there were eleven over an eleven-week period) was:

1. One-hour lecture by a university consultant.
2. One-hour discussion in small groups with school counselors as leaders.
3. Two-hour session to develop classroom material to foster self-understanding.

Specific presentations centered about such topics as self-concept (Who am I), mechanisms that distort reality and healthy personality. Teachers developed in material form a handbook, a book of useful teaching practices, a standing file of teaching units and a film slide on childhood self-concept.

Let me give you also some examples of occurrences that took place in the school classroom that were rather significant. In one discussion with the teachers about self-concept and its ramifications in the classroom with

the Afro-American child, I mentioned at one point that "Black is beautiful," a theme of course accepted in the Black Power Movement. One of the teachers in turn brought this back to her first grade class. That evening she received a call from an Afro-American mother who quietly thanked her for what she had done. She stated that her girl had run into the house breathless shouting, "Mommy, Mommy, Mrs. Smith said Black is beautiful, Black is beautiful." That teacher had a significant effect on what that seven-year-old child was telling herself.

Teachers developed any number of creative ways to work in the area of self-concept; ways which did not go beyond their particular competence. Here are but a few:

> Developing the concept of self among my third graders hasn't been an easy task. For the past week we had classroom activities which involved much pupil participation. The children are now beginning to take a look at themselves and are beginning to wonder and ask themselves questions like; Who am I?, What do I want to be?, Who would I like to be?, Why do I want to be like this person?, and How do others see me?
>
> Some of the activities in our classroom required that the children talk and write about themselves. One such activity was a letter written to me by each child. In this letter they were to tell me who they were without using their names. They were to tell me what they thought about themselves and why they thought this.
>
> A study of self can be a theme even with kindergarteners.
>
> After reading <u>The Three Little Pigs</u>, I decided our fairy tale characters would be a good source for acquainting my kindergarteners with the concept of self actualization. I began by reviewing the goals the pigs had set for themselves. Each pig wanted to build a house and make a home for himself. Only one of the pigs was able to attain his goal, so there was only one happy pig in the story.
>
> The next story we reviewed was <u>Jack and the Beanstalk</u>. We decided Jack's goal was to outwit the giant and make it possible for him and his mother to live comfortably. Jack was then able to live happily ever after.
>
> To contrast these stories we reviewed <u>The Fisherman and his</u>

Wife. The wife was a person who would never be happy because she was never satisfied with her life. She went from a fisherman's wife to a queen. Then she wanted to become lord of the sun and the moon. She finally lost everything and became a fisherman's wife again.

At this point, I felt the children were ready to relate the idea of goals to themselves. I explained that as we grow up we begin to set goals for ourselves.

We feel at this point that the program was successful, both in a spiritual and intuitive way and a more objective evaluation that took place. It at least justifies a more comprehensive program that could explore this further, encompassing a more scientific measurement of a change, "In the things that youngsters tell themselves."

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